Lafayette Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 133, Lafayette, California 94549

President: Oliver Hamlin (o. 283-6822; h. 284-1446)
Editor: Shirley Thomson (o. 284-1166; h. 284-2995)

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

In Lafayette we feel very fortunate to have gone through the October 17 earthquake with little or no damage. Our hearts go out to the many people in the Bay Area who were not so lucky. Thanksgiving time is almost upon us, and we have much to be thankful for.

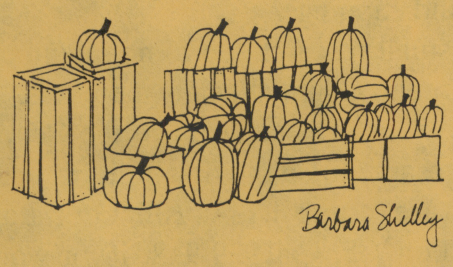
Enclosed in our newsletter this time is a flyer regarding a high quality new book published by Bedford Fine Arts and entitled *O California!* It is a history in photographs. The publisher has offered to rebate $10 to the Society for each book purchased by our members and friends—so sale of the book will be a fundraiser on our part. Please give it your thoughtful consideration after reading the details. It is a very handsome book you would be proud to own or give as a gift.

A recent interview with members of the Hunt family revealed a fascinating story about a series of ice cream parlors operated by that early Lafayette family over many years of the town's history. A tape recording was made of the interview which George Wasson, Bill Wakeman, and I conducted. The tape and a typed transcription of it will be filed in our archives in the Lafayette Library. It is an interesting story going back to 1913, told by native Lafayette residents.

Warm wishes for a happy Thanksgiving.

Best regards,

Oliver D. Hamlin



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LAFAYETTE CEMETERY

Christine Schreiber, former manager of the Lafayette Cemetery, is preparing a manuscript and history of the pioneer families buried in our local cemetery. Keep up the good work, Christine.

ORAL HISTORY

The Hunt family oral history interview summarized in our feature story will be transcribed verbatim in a few weeks to be placed on file in the Lafayette Library. Interested readers are encouraged to borrow this and other tapes and/or interview transcripts from the LHS files at the library. A quick check of LHS cabinets at the library this week showed more than forty oral history transcripts on file and available to interested readers.

DUES: HAVE YOU PAID?

An asterisk on your address label indicates dues are still unpaid for 1989. Payment of $10 for a family membership will keep your name on the list. Checks should be made payable to Lafayette Historical Society and mailed to P.O.Box 133, Lafayette.

BOARD MEETING

The next meeting of the Society's Board of Directors and Committee Chairpersons is set for 7:30 p.m., Wednesday evening, January 10, at Jop and Irene Van Overveen's home. Member attendance is welcomed; please call the hosts (283-3650) or Ollie Hamlin (283-6822 or 284-1446) for information and directions.

LOCAL HISTORY BOOKS MAKE TREASURED HOLIDAY GIFTS!

LHS-published *LaFayette: A Pictorial History* and *The Improvers* are available at the Lafayette Bookstore, Amadeus Bookstore, and at Friends of the Lafayette Library book sales.

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Contra Costa County History Center has many items and services that may be of interest to our members. Those involved in local area historical research can make use of the County Society's many books on the county, maps of local areas, photographs of local people and communities, and its wide variety of historical records, documents, and clippings.

There is a small research fee to nonmembers; services are free to County Society members.

The History Center is adjacent to the Central Library in Pleasant Hill in the first building in the Hayward State complex – 1700 Oak Park Boulevard, Room C5. Call 939-9180 if you would like more information. Inquiries are welcomed.

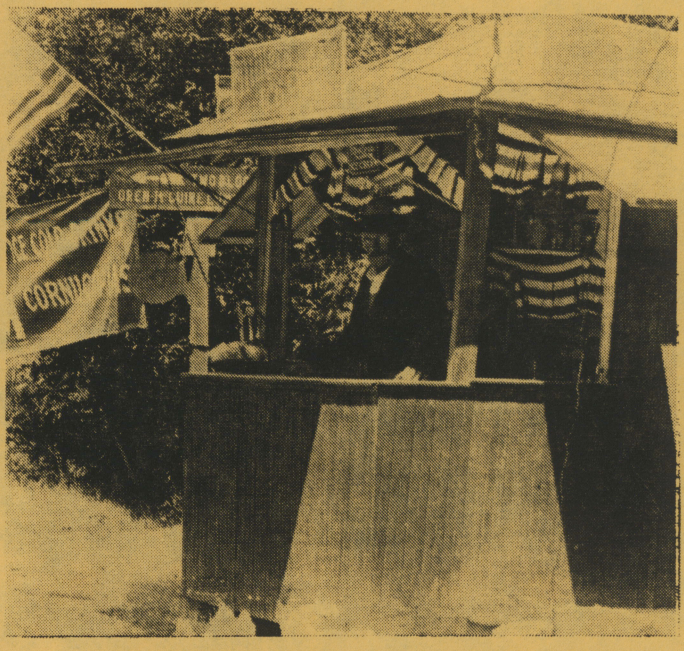
LAFAYETTE'S EARLY ICE CREAM PARLORS – HUNT FAMILY INTERVIEWED

by Oliver D. Hamlin

A most interesting oral history interview was held on October 31, 1989, when three members of the Hunt family of Lafayette and an LHS committee traced the history of the ice cream parlors which flourished in Lafayette from about 1913 to 1933. Present at the interview were Harold Hunt; Dorothy Hunt, his wife; and Frances Hunt, sister-in-law of Harold Hunt; with George Wasson, Bill Wakeman, and Ollie Hamlin of the Lafayette Historical Society.

Interest was aroused recently when the old building on Lafayette Circle (formerly Hough Avenue) near Mt. Diablo Boulevard became vacant after the Nifty Thrift Shop moved to another location on Oakland Street in Lafayette. Bill Wakeman, member of the LHS Board of Directors and a lifelong resident of Lafayette, immediately identified the building as the "old ice cream parlor" which existed long before the Nifty Thrift Shop was established. He and George Wasson arranged a meeting and an oral history interview with the owners of the property to get the full story of the building and the family who owns it. It is true that this old building on Lafayette Circle was in fact the old ice cream parlor, but it was learned that it was the third of three ice cream parlors operated by the Hunt family in Lafayette in the period 1913-33. A fascinating story unfolded.

Alice Hunt, aunt of Harold Hunt, started the operation in about 1913. She was a very enterprising woman who decided to take advantage of the tourist traffic coming to Lafayette via the new Oakland-Antioch Railroad (later known as the Sacramento Northern) which began operation in 1913. She opened a small ice cream store at the west Lafayette station with ice cream, hot dogs, and other food sold mainly to tourists. Several members of the Hunt family helped to run the business. A real estate office was also established at the train station to sell lots in Lafayette. Alice Hunt made arrangements with the Miller Ice Cream Company of Oakland to supply and ship ice-packed ice cream to Lafayette by the same train. The Hunts had to add salt to the ice to keep the product frozen, because, of course, there was no refrigeration in those days. The business flourished.



Austin Robert ("Joe") Hunt at the first Lafayette ice cream stand, circa 1914.

In 1921 the business was relocated into a larger building on the north side of Tunnel Road (now Mt. Diablo Boulevard) near where Peter Thomson's blacksmith shop stood – the present location of the Bank of America.

Site #2, 1921

On Mt. Diablo at corner of Hough Ave. in 1924. Alice Hunt and Fred Bennet near entry. Joe Hunt at car. Children not identified.

Hunt Family Interview, continued

The ice cream business continued to thrive. In 1924 the store was moved to its third location, the south side of Mt. Diablo Boulevard at the corner of Hough Avenue. Some years later the building itself was moved around the corner to face onto the side street to make room for a parking lot and probably to benefit from the shade of the huge oak tree at the new site. Alice Hunt continued to operate the ice cream and food business at this location until 1933. On a good day she would sell fifty to sixty gallons of ice cream. That represents a lot of ice cream cones – and a lot of work for five cents apiece. In 1933 Prohibition was abolished and the Hunt family decided to lease the building to Lou Borghesani for operation of a saloon. Thus, twenty years of a thriving ice cream business came to an end.

Five members of the Hunt family still own the property at the corner of Mt. Diablo Boulevard and Lafayette Circle which consists of the old ice cream parlor building, the parking lot on the corner, and the current Roundup Saloon. Petar's Restaurant is now leasing the ice cream parlor property for storage and parking.

Alice Hunt died in 1935. She was well known and loved by many people in Lafayette for many years. The fact that she assisted in the birth of numerous Lafayette children probably earned her the loving name of "Mother Hunt."

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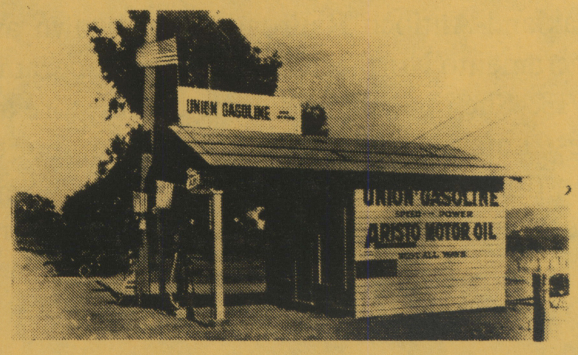
The Union gasoline station which Alice and Joe Hunt operated for a short time is shown in the 1920 photo below. The station was located at Old Tunnel Road and Reliez Station Road near where the current Hungry Hunter Restaurant is now located at the Pleasant Hill and Mt. Diablo Boulevard intersection. This was one of the first gas stations of its kind in Contra Costa County. Joe Hunt died in the early 1920s.



TREE OF LIGHTS

The large oak tree near the old ice cream store on Lafayette Circle just south off Mt. Diablo Boulevard will soon be lit up for the holidays this year as a project of Hospice of Contra Costa. The Hunt family, our own Bill Wakeman, and others have been instrumental in making this project called Hospice Tree of Lights come into being. The Fire District will be putting up the lights; PG&E is contributing the power.

Your support is invited. For a gift to the project of $10, you will add another light to this bright symbol in the center or Lafayette and aid a valuable community organization in its good work.

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O CALIFORNIA!

NEW PICTORIAL BOOK FOR HISTORY BUFFS

A beautiful new book, *O California! Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Landscapes and Observations*, is being offered by Bedford Arts Publishers at a reduced prepublication price of $65. The publishers will contribute $10 to the Society for each book purchased by LHS members before December 31. Please see the attached description and order form. Orders should be sent directly to the publisher.

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GIFTS TO LHS ARCHIVES

Mrs. Marjorie Howard, of 889 Moraga Road, Lafayette, recently donated to the Society a collection of materials of historical interest. Mrs. Howard has lived in Lafayette for about forty years. Her late husband, C. B. Howard, was an U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel during World War II, made his career with Pacific Telephone Company, and served as Post Commander of the Lafayette American Legion. Their son, A. B. Howard, worked as a free-lance photographer; numerous photos made by him were used by the *Lafayette Sun*. Some particularly interesting items are listed below.

- *Lafayette Horse Show souvenir program, 1940*
- *Lafayette School photo, class of 1940, complete with all names*
- *1936 supplement of* **Oakland Tribune** *documenting construction of the Broadway Tunnel, Bay Bridge, and Golden Gate Bridge*
- *Title company map of Lafayette area, January 1954*
- *Scenic photo of Mt. Diablo Boulevard, 1953*
- **Lafayette Sun** *feature article on the Howards' next-door neighbor, Emil Herman, who was famous for growing yellow narcissus*
- *V-E Day edition (5/8/45),* **San Francisco Chronicle**
- *Reverse telephone directory dated February 1957 listed by street address for all cities in C. C. County.*

Other items recently added to LHS archives include Historic Preservation files contributed by Ruth Dyer and copies of Hunt family photos.

Our sincere thanks to Marjorie Howard, Ruth Dyer, and the Hunt family for their contributions to our collection.

Readers interested in donating old photographs or other materials relevant to Lafayette history are urged to write the LHS at P.O. Box 133, Lafayette, or to call Ollie Hamlin at 283-6822.

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It's often said that it was the new tunnel that inspired people to come from across the bay to live in Lafayette, but probably water was more important. The reservoir gave us a reliable source of water and made Lafayette an attractive place to live. Before the reservoir was built, people's wells often dried up in the late summer.

—Harold Hunt, October 1989

Alice Hunt's ice cream stand – site #2 in 1921 – located between presentday Safeway store and Bank of America. Children not identified.

LAFAYETTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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FIRST CLASS MAIL